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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 2191
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 3252
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RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 002567

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

In this morning's front-page headlines, both Yediot Ahronot and Ma'ariv highlighted the trial of John Ivan Demjanjuk that is set to begin in Germany today.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu cancelled a scheduled visit to

Berlin due to what his doctors described as a slight seasonal illness. Netanyahu's visit to Germany was to have been part of a larger meeting between Israeli and German cabinet ministers in the context of a joint effort by the two countries to forge closer ties. Ma'ariv reports that the visit has been rescheduled for January 12010.

The settlement construction freeze is still in the news this morning, as Yediot Ahronot reported that some settlers on the ground reportedly have begun to take measures to bypass the enforcement of the measure. The paper reported that settlers in a number of West Bank settlements have begun to hastily lay fake foundations for buildings that had been given construction permits so as to allow them to begin construction work even in the course of the current moratorium. Politicians have begun to use the developments in this sphere as a means of improving their own political standing among their supporters. Defense Minister Ehud Barak yesterday told other top Labor Party officials that the settlement construction freeze proved just how crucial his role was in steering this government towards peace. Israel Hayom quoted Barak as having said: "Ask yourselves what would have happened had we not been in the government and instead of us there were 'Ketzele' (MK Yaakov Katz) and Ben-Ari. Would the government have been capable of making a decision about two states, about suspending construction in the settlements and about a renewal of the negotiations?" Meanwhile, Likud ministers who are not members of the security cabinet also spoke out yesterday against the settlement construction freeze. Dan Margalit criticizes them in Israel Hayom today, especially for focusing their anger at Ehud Barak and refraining from pointing an accusatory finger at the prime minister.

The main headline in Haaretz and Israel Hayom this morning focused on the revelation by the State Attorney's Office last night that Israel was considering the release of 980 prisoners in exchange for Gilad Shalit: 450 demanded by Hamas and 530 that Israel would free unilaterally.

Block Quotes:

Mideast:

I. "Likud's harmful resistance"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (11/30): "The Likud Knesset members' show of strength in presenting Netanyahu with a list of opponents of the temporary settlement freeze is damaging and unnecessary... The Likud lawmakers are refusing to accept... that Israel... must make at least one small goodwill gesture to the world, led by the United States... Amid the bluster of Likud ministers Livnat, Kahlon, Erdan, Shalom, and Edelstein, Netanyahu is being depicted as a tragic hero about to embark on a fateful decision. This is, of course, grotesque and ludicrous... If Netanyahu surrenders to pressure on such an inconsequential, elementary matter, he will certainly not be able to stand before the settlers if and when the real moment of truth arrives. Likud's blusterers - some of whom denigrated the Obama government as "anti-Semitic," an evictor of Jews - want to prove that the prime minister can be pressured and extorted, to show the U.S. president who is really in charge of Israel. Netanyahu must prove to himself, his government, and this country's citizens that authority lies with him, not with those orchestrating calculated resistance."

II. "The Opposing Ministers are Playing Make-Believe"

Veteran journalist and television anchor Dan Margalit wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (11/30): "Members of Knesset Hotovely, Danon and Levine believe with all their hearts that the suspension of construction in the settlements for ten months is an historic error. Their position is an asset to the Likud... The position maintained by Benny Begin and Moshe Yaalon is problematic but respectable. They came to the conclusion that the freeze would also be the lesser of all evils. They both could have voted against... But Begin and Yaalon voted in favor... The opposite course of action was taken by Livnat, Kahlon, Erdan, Edelstein and Shalom. They waited for the security cabinet vote to approve the freeze and immediately thereafter began to talk about their opposition to the

decision. Heroes in retrospect who let the horses out of the stable and then rushed to slam the doors shut behind them. They shouldered no risk by doing so. In order to soften Binyamin Netanyahu's anger they cast the... decision as a dictate that was handed down by Ehud Barak... That suits Barak just fine. He has utilized that criticism against him to claim that his decision to have the Labor Party join the coalition government was the right move... The demand to convene the Likud Central Committee to discuss the settlement construction freeze does not threaten [Netanyahu]. He knows that the rebellious ministers are merely play-acting... But Netanyahu would do well were he to bear in mind that every political rebellion that initially appeared to be fleeting, sometimes culminated in the fall of the government, a split in the party, and/or a shift to the opposition."

III. "She Said I Was Awful"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/30): "It is not easy to defend Barack Obama's foreign policy these days. This is a particularly difficult task in Israel, where according to one poll, only 4 percent of the population have confidence in him. It is doubtful whether there has ever been an American president who was less popular in Israel than Barack Obama... Nevertheless, Obama deserves to be defended... Bush left him scorched earth in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, the European Union, Russia, Latin America, and the Middle East... critics of his path say that it has not scored impressive achievements until now. They are right. But the alternative... achieved even less... He sought to bring the sides to the negotiating table. He thought that a freeze... would be the prize that would draw in Abu Mazen and the Saudi royal family. This aspiration could be called naive. It cannot be said that it was "awful." Obama launched a dialogue with Iran... The question whether this effort will bear fruit is open, but... it is a necessary stage. Without it, there is no chance of stopping Iran by other means. Is the way the Obama administration is handling Iran "awful" for Israel? The opposite is true. True, the Obama administration has made a series of tactical errors in its handling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is true, that the administration was not experienced enough to understand the sensitivities and expectations of the Israelis. But all these criticisms are dwarfed by the administration's sincere desire to promote an arrangement. For 16 years, we were indulged by administrations that mainly told us what we wanted to hear... A slightly less indulgent president might be more beneficial to us. Give Obama a chance, because he's the only one who is willing to take one. Give him a chance, because more than him needing a chance, we Israelis need one."

IV. "We Can See You"

Veteran journalist and television anchor Yaron London wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/30): "The optical spies working in the service of states have a very sharp glance... That is why I was amused by the attorney general's warning that the state would find it difficult to implement... the decision to freeze construction over the Green Line... [It] stems from the need to preserve our relations with the world power that protects us, and therefore, in the opinion of the cabinet ministers, it is an important decision... The Judea and Samaria hills are a tiny area. It only takes one person looking every day at updated satellite images to discover any change there. This is what the Defense Ministry in fact did, and with surprising speed, sent a photography plane to document the topographic reality in detail... The problem does not lie in the difficulty to locate them, but rather in the will to enforce the law on them. The will is weak. Israel's governments have accustomed us to the sense that the rebellion of the annexers of the occupied territories is a law of nature, or perhaps a version of "cops and robbers," in which the cops are not real police officers and the robbers no more than good boys disguised as criminal offenders. Youthful folly should not be punished, perhaps only gently reprimanded, and the policemen and soldiers will quarrel with them cautiously. Some of the buildings will be demolished and then rebuilt, demolished, and so on and so forth, until the spineless jellyfish known as the state is worn down and they remain standing.

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